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NOFORN

NEA/ARP; NSC FOR JOHN BRENNAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2029

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT BRENNAN'S SEPT 5 DISCUSSION
WITH SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTER PRINCE NAYIF

REF: RIYADH 1178

Classified By: CG Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (S/NF) During CDA Richard Erdman's September 5 meeting with Saudi Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Prince Nayif bin Abdulaziz (reftel), John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, stressed USG condemnation of the August 28 terrorist attack on Assistant Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayif (MbN) and strong USG support for Saudi Arabia in combating violent extremism. Nayif emphasized that the attack had in no way diminished the SAG's resolve to eliminate terrorism -- despite the danger -- and described SAG's multifaceted approach, which combines refuting terrorist ideology, security operations, and rehabilitation. The Prince also complained that Iran had breached its 2001 security agreement with KSA and was supporting aggression against the kingdom; expressed frustration with European nations for allowing terrorists to operate against KSA rather than handing them over, and requested US intercession to change this European policy. Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to the US-Saudi relationship begun by FDR and King Abdulaziz, especially the partnership between security channels. End summary.

USG SUPPORT FOR SAUDI ARABIA

2. (S/NF) At a previously scheduled September 5 farewell call on Prince Nayif, Charge introduced Mr. Brennan and asked him to brief on Washington perspectives on current counterterrorism challenges and efforts. Brennan opened by conveying U.S. condemnation and concern over the August 27 attack on Assistant Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayif as well as our great relief that he had survived the cowardly attack. In this regard, he said he had brought a personal letter from President Obama to Prince Mohammed expressing our concern and best wishes. The U.S., he continued, greatly admired and appreciated the courageous work being done by the Ministry of Interior and the Mabahith against violent extremism and terrorism.

SHARED CONCERNS ABOUT YEMEN

3. (S/NF) President Obama felt personally outraged by the attack, Brennan said, and emphasized that it was critically important that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia went forward in the fight against violent extremism. Noting that he would be visiting Yemen the following day, Brennan said he would stress to President Saleh, in the strongest possible terms, the importance of combating terrorism and resolving the serious problems facing his country. Brennan also confirmed

to Prince Nayif that the USG was working very closely with the Mabahith and would be discussing in the coming days how to approach the threat coming from Yemen.

NAYIF: NO WEAKENING OF SAUDI RESOLVE AGAINST TERRORISM

14. (S/NF) Thanking Brennan for USG support, Nayif emphasized that the attack had not weakened SAG's resolve to eliminate terrorism. Following the incident, he said, the King met with MbN, who stressed that acts of terror "would not keep us from working and doing our job." At the same time, the door must always remain open to those militants who wanted to return to society. These terrorists were attacking the country as a whole and would not hesitate to attack anyone to reach their goals. "Every Saudi official is at risk of attack," he said. "Despite this, we are still willing to put forth more effort against terrorism, which is more dangerous than any illness." Fear of losing one's life was not a reason to stop working. We had a duty to defend the country, and it was preferable to die doing one's duty. "God determined a person's fate and everyone will go back to God."

15. (S/NF) Nayif then described SAG's approach to terrorism as including countering terrorist ideology, armed counterterrorism operations, and a rehabilitation program for militants who surrendered. The SAG has created a strategic communications center where intellectuals and imams worked to explain to the public that terrorists were working against the true ways of Islam and attacking Saudi society. In countering the spread of jihadist ideology, Nayif added, the Friday mosque sermons -- delivered four times a month in the country's more than 15,000 mosques -- were one of the most effective vehicles.

16. (S/NF) Asked about the economic impact of the recent attack, Nayif asserted that Saudi Arabia was better off than any country in the region and among the best-situated globally in terms of economic activity. Using a favorite line, he said: "We know that capital is a coward and wants a safe place." For this reason, people could invest with confidence in the Kingdom, the economy was growing, and the government was continuing its development plans. The economy was thriving and the security situation was good despite being among the countries most subject to terrorist attacks. Saudi Arabia had thwarted more than 200 terrorist operations, he said, and only 5 percent of planned attacks had actually occurred. "We've achieved many things in protecting the country and, God willing, we will achieve many more things with our friends." Brennan praised SAG efforts to combat terrorism: "I wish other countries in the world were as willing and capable." Saudi Arabia, he stated, was on the front line of terrorism, a model in preventing individuals from being corrupted by the propaganda of Al Qaeda, and thus instrumental in demonstrating to the West and the U.S. that Al Qaeda was a perversion of Islam and did not represent the true faith.

IRAN PROMOTING TERRORISM

17. (S/NF) Nayif complained that over the past two years Iran has hosted Saudis (all Sunnis) -- including Osama bin Laden's son Ibrahim -- who had contacts with terrorists and worked against the Kingdom. SAG considered this aggressive action a breach of the 2001 security agreement between the two nations. The SAG has informed Iran through its ambassador and the MFA, asking the GOI to hand over these Saudis. Nayif recalled that after the operations in Khobar in 1996, the SAG tried to open channels with Iran and tried to improve relations during Khatami's presidency. He himself had met personally with Iranian National Security Secretary General Dr. Hassan Rohani (Iran's Supreme Council on National Security) and had signed a security agreement in which Iran promised to show respect and not take any actions inside or outside Iran against the Kingdom. Brennan agreed that Iran

had the capacity to cause trouble, and assured the Prince that the USG was very concerned and looking carefully at the situation. President Obama's willingness to talk to the Iranians did not mean he did not understand the problem. Brennan emphasized the SAG's strong friends in the White House, including President Obama, wanted to work very closely with Saudi Arabia on this front.

FRUSTRATION WITH EUROPE

18. (S/NF) Nayif expressed frustration with the limited cooperation of friendly European nations with whom the Kingdom has security agreements. The governments, he complained, shared information but did not take any action. As a result, "terrorists roam around freely in their countries," and the Europeans have not handed over terrorists. For example, Ibrahim (Salih Mohammed Al-Yacoub), a very important suspect involved in the Khobar bombing, was in Europe. Saudi Arabia asked several nations to hand him over as a terrorist who had acted against the Kingdom and the United States. Nayif complained that while these European countries were friendly, had good relations, and shared interests with the Kingdom, he failed to understand why Europeans harbored terrorists working against Saudi Arabia in their countries. If there were people in Saudi Arabia working against friendly countries, the SAG would intervene. Nayif requested USG help in convincing Europe to work more cooperatively. Brennan commented that we had similar frustrations with some countries.

USG-SAUDI SECURITY TIES STRONGER THAN EVER

19. (S/NF) Throughout the two-hour meeting, Nayif highlighted the importance of bilateral security cooperation, noting that the level of professional exchange has been excellent. Nayif commented that there has been success in exchanging information, procuring the best, newest, most updated technology and in finding and preventing terrorist acts before they happen. The final goal, he stressed, was to stop terrorists and "dry out their resources." Asked by Charge if he meant terrorist financing, Nayif replied: "Yes. When we say 'resources' we mean people, training, and money. We have found huge sums of money on many terrorists we have caught." Nayif expressed the hope that through joint cooperation Al Qaeda as the source of terrorism in the Kingdom and throughout the world could be destroyed. He added that the support from U.S.-Saudi leadership in this area was critically important to reach the goal. Nayif thanked President Obama for supporting strengthened security ties between the two countries and said that King Abdullah was strongly committed to cooperating with the United States against terrorism. Recalling the 1945 visit between FDR and King Abdulaziz, Nayif declared, "We're acting upon what they decided." Brennan responded that President Obama would be pleased to hear that the Saudi commitment to our special relationship remained stronger than ever.

110. (U) This message was cleared by Assistant to the President John Brennan.

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